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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): Colleagues, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study of Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, we have a number of witnesses today and for the full two hours, these witnesses will be in front of us.

From the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we have Jeffery Hutchinson, commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard and Mario Pelletier, deputy commissioner, operations, Canadian Coast Guard. From the Department of National Defence, we have Major-General William Seymour, deputy commander, Canadian joint operations, and from the Department of Transport, Jane Weldon, director general, marine safety and security. Welcome to all of you.

It's always an exciting time when you get people for two full hours in front of the committee. I understand that you'll make some opening statements, so I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Hutchinson. We'll start with Mr. Hutchinson, we'll go through the panel and then, colleagues, we'll get into questions.

I will turn the floor over to you.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson (Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon to all the members of the committee. As was stated, my name is Jeff Hutchinson and I am the commissioner of the Coast Guard. I'm pleased to be here with Mario Pelletier, who is deputy commissioner of operations for the Coast Guard. It's our honour to be here as well with our very close partners from the armed forces and Transport Canada. We are pleased to have an opportunity, which is exciting as the chair noted, to discuss Canadian sovereignty, particularly as it relates to the Arctic and the roles of our respective organizations in the north.

Perhaps, to state the obvious, sovereignty can be a difficult term with both legal and geopolitical complexities. Today, my colleagues and I wish to focus on three aspects of sovereignty, which we hope you'll find useful in your deliberations. Those aspects are stewardship, security and safety, especially as it relates to regulation of activity in our north. I will elaborate on the Coast Guard's role, in particular, focusing on Arctic stewardship. My colleagues will touch on security and safety, respectively. We'll speak as if the Arctic mission and our Arctic presence is done in silos. In fact, it is important to underscore that our organizations work very closely together, knit together in a partnership that's effective, in our view.

The Canadian Coast Guard mandate includes authorities that put us in command of on-water search and rescue and environmental response. That goes with the responsibility of being a first responder. However, our mandate, especially in the Arctic, might better be captured by the idea of stewardship. Why do I connect stewardship and sovereignty? We care for what we value. We care for our own. It is the Canadian connection to the Arctic that drives us to protect a remote and fragile environment, to partner with people of ancient traditions, and to enable leading-edge science in a rapidly changing region.

Please allow me to be clear. I do not mean to say that the Coast Guard is the steward of the Arctic, not at all. We are but a steward in the Arctic. Major-General Seymour's views on the security of the Arctic and Ms. Weldon's views on the proper safe regulation of the Arctic both contribute to a robust view of how Canada expresses and exercises its sovereignty. I would contend that the Coast Guard's role in stewardship contributes to the same outcome.

[*Translation*]

The Canadian Coast Guard is regarded as a leader in Arctic issues. What does this mean in specific terms?

The Coast Guard provides marine domain awareness to federal partners such as the Armed Forces and Transport Canada through the Marine Communications and Traffic Services office in Iqaluit. That office maintains 24/7 operational awareness across the North American Arctic throughout the navigation season.

The Coast Guard deploys up to seven icebreakers to the Arctic, the majority of which are equipped with a helicopter, to ensure community resupply, to support Arctic science and to assist commercial shipping. Of course, these ships respond as needed to search and rescue and environmental response cases. Services include shipping escort, providing ice information and routing advice, harbour breakouts, flood control, and the supply of dry cargo and fuel to northern communities.

As of September 13 of this year, the Coast Guard has conducted 57 escorts and coordinated 30 search and rescue cases.

[*English*]

The Coast Guard is responsible for some 2,000 aids to navigation in the Arctic, including buoys, markers and radio towers, which we install and maintain to ensure safe shipping. The aids to navigation program assists marine navigation, determining positioning and course, warning of dangers or obstructions to navigation, and marking the location of preferred routes. We also contribute to Canada's marine domain awareness in the high latitudes by identifying and monitoring vessels in the area. Our base in Hay River in the Northwest Territories ensures a year-round northern presence with a focus on the Mackenzie River.

The Coast Guard maintains strong partnerships with indigenous people, who rely on our icebreakers to ensure the timely arrival of fuel, building materials, vehicles and all manner of goods that are uneconomical to carry by plane. We are fully committed to working with indigenous partners and stakeholders to ensure safe and secure marine shipping in the Arctic. We have a number of initiatives to support this engagement. For example, we have 15 community-based Canadian Coast Guard auxiliary units active at this time, with over 200 auxiliary members and 25 vessels. Those numbers are expected to continue to go up in 2019.

● (1535)

We're also building bases and training local people in search and rescue. On June 28, 2018, we opened a seasonal inshore rescue boat station in Rankin Inlet—the first of its kind in the north and crewed by Inuit youth—to enhance northern search and rescue capacity and to strengthen our relationships with these communities.

[*Translation*]

As an asset for the Government of Canada, our fleet has a long history of supporting enforcement activities of National Defence, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and other federal departments. The Coast Guard's icebreakers also provide a mobile scientific platform for Canadian scientists in the Arctic.

In 2014 and 2015, we participated in Canada's definition of its continental shelf for the Arctic Ocean by sending our icebreakers to the North Pole where they worked together to map these waters.

[*English*]

Thanks to the oceans protection plan, we're extending the operating season for Coast Guard ships working in the Arctic, allowing earlier resupply of fuel and other critical goods to northern communities. A longer shipping season also means greater economic opportunity for northerners looking to move goods to southern markets.

I might just note before concluding that the Coast Guard has also engaged in international co-operation, as it relates to the Arctic. Our principle forum being the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, where we participate with seven other Arctic nations at an operational level to make sure that coast guard organizations are working collaboratively to cover the vast distances that are common in the Arctic region.

Interest in the Arctic continues to rise as changing climate conditions are making the Canadian Arctic more accessible for marine traffic and economic development. More marine traffic means a greater risk of incidents. There is a misconception that melting ice makes it easier for vessels to navigate our northern waters. In fact, the unpredictability of broken ice floes adds to the risk of navigation. Those factors will continue to increase the demand for Coast Guard services.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for this opportunity. Along with my colleagues, I will look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hutchinson.

I understand we'll go now to Major-General Seymour.

Major-General William Seymour (Deputy Commander, Canadian Joint Operations Command, Department of National Defence): Yes, sir.

Mr. Chair and committee members, good afternoon. I am Major-General Bill Seymour. It is my pleasure to appear in front of the committee today, along with Commissioner Hutchinson and my colleagues from the Canadian Coast Guard, and of course, Jane Weldon from Transport Canada.

[*Translation*]

I am the deputy commander of the Canadian Joint Operations Command, responsible for planning and carrying out Canadian Armed Forces operations and joint exercises throughout the world, including in Canada's North.

[*English*]

The Arctic is a key priority for the Canadian Armed Forces and its security and defence are built into our core missions, as defined in our defence policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged".

As a part of our vision of being strong at home and secure in North America, we are tasked with detecting, deterring and defending against threats, conducting search and rescue, and responding to domestic disasters and emergencies. Accordingly, the Canadian Armed Forces protects Canadians and ensures Canada's Arctic sovereignty in two main ways. First, through maintaining a year-round regional presence, and second, through domain awareness operations, which allow us to know what is going on.

The Canadian Armed Forces Arctic presence is anchored by joint task force north in Yellowknife, with permanent detachments in Whitehorse and Iqaluit. I spoke with the task force commander Brigadier General Carpentier yesterday and he looks forward to your visit up there.

We share facilities in Resolute Bay with Natural Resources Canada, which houses both the Canadian Armed Forces Arctic training centre and Canada's polar continental shelf program. We also share the facilities in CFS Eureka and CFS Alert with personnel from Environment and Climate Change Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Canadian Rangers are an integral part of our northern presence through their support for our operations and the important link they provide to northern and indigenous communities.

[*English*]

We conduct a host of operations and exercises, including those under Operation Nanook, to maintain our ability to operate effectively and be a key partner in Arctic safety, security and defence.

We also provide search and rescue services and have the ability to rapidly deploy forces to the Arctic from the south of Canada. I would like to emphasize that due to the operational challenges posed by the harsh Arctic environment, collaboration with partners at the community, territorial, federal and international levels is essential to what we do in the north.

Knowing what's happening in the Arctic is critical to ensuring Arctic security. Through Operation Limpid, our routine domestic surveillance operation, we detect threats as early as possible in all domains. To do this, we work in close collaboration with the Canadian Coast Guard, Transport Canada, Canada Border Services Agency and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police through the marine security operations centres, or MSOCS, to detect and assess marine-based threats.

NORAD is also essential to domain awareness in the north through its missions of aerospace warning, aerospace control and maritime warning for North America. With increased international interest and activity in the region, the stakes for ensuring the security of Canadians in the north are increasing.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

To accomplish this, we have policy directions through Strong, Secure, Engaged to enhance the mobility, reach, and footprint of the Canadian Armed Forces in the north.

[*English*]

We are also acquiring a range of Arctic-focused capabilities, including the Arctic and offshore patrol vessels—the first of which touched salt water for the first time on Saturday—and space-based capabilities, as well as search and rescue aircraft and upgrades to our search and rescue helicopters. I will incorporate these capabilities into a systems-of-systems approach to domain awareness. This means combining data from all of our assets and those of our partners in every domain to provide a clear picture of what's happening.

In the coming years, we'll continue to work with our American partners to modernize NORAD, taking into account the full range of threats and new technologies, to improve surveillance in the Arctic. We'll also conduct joint operations and exercises to strengthen information sharing with Arctic allies and partners, including NATO. The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, which Canada hosted for the first time in May, and that I chaired, is an important forum for co-operation at the international level.

Lastly, we'll continue to collaborate with our partners to ensure a whole-of-government approach to Arctic security. We maintain excellent relationships with these partners, including with northern and indigenous communities, and will continue this collaboration moving forward.

It's been a pleasure to speak to you this afternoon, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Director Weldon, please.

Ms. Jane Weldon (Director General, Marine Safety and Security, Department of Transport): Thank you, Chair.

Along with my colleagues, Commissioner Hutchinson and Major-General Seymour, I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee about some aspects of Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic as they relate to maritime transportation.

As global commerce in the Arctic has increased, northern resource development has become more and more important to Canada, and it will continue to do so. The economic potential of the north is of growing significance to other Arctic states as well, and to other non-Arctic states with an interest in the north. Given this context, it's essential to continue to exercise sovereignty over maritime regions under Canada's jurisdiction.

[*Translation*]

To this end, a number of federal departments and agencies are working together with provincial, territorial, community and international partners to maintain a Canadian presence, response capability and law enforcement, as well as appropriate situational awareness.

Transport Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard and the Department of National Defence are working together with other partners to ensure the safety and security of vessels through a legislative program that includes unique requirements for vessels operating in the Canadian Arctic.

[*English*]

When Commissioner Hutchinson spoke earlier, he laid out three pillars: stewardship, security and safety. Transport Canada's major role flows from our regulatory role with respect to safety and security in the north. We don't have the lovely assets that everyone likes to travel on.

[*Translation*]

Two main legislative measures, the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, and the Maritime Transportation Security Act, establish the framework for Transport Canada authorities and for vessels operating in Canadian waters, including those in the Arctic.

[*English*]

A third piece of legislation, the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, is applicable only to vessels operating in Canadian Arctic waters. In December of last year, Transport Canada introduced the new Arctic shipping safety and pollution prevention regulations, which incorporate requirements of the International Maritime Organization's polar code.

Furthermore, the oceans protection plan, or OPP, will improve Transport Canada's marine safety and security oversight operations in the Arctic and, of course, it will support Canadian Coast Guard and the others partners in the oceans protection plan. It's also going to enhance local marine pollution reporting and monitoring of offshore vessels.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

These efforts, which will also support Canadian sovereignty, will especially benefit from the construction of a hangar in Iqaluit for patrol flights under the national aerial surveillance program.

The program provides 500 hours of surveillance flights annually in the Canadian Arctic. These flights take place in the Arctic navigation season, from July to October or November.

Under another initiative of the oceans protection plan, Transport Canada is working in partnership with two Arctic communities, Cambridge Bay and Tuktoyaktuk, to test a comprehensive and user-friendly marine awareness system that will provide information and data on marine activity, including sea traffic.

[*English*]

The system will provide indigenous and coastal communities with a real-time picture of maritime activity in local waters.

As I mentioned earlier, we work with partners at all levels to protect Canada's Arctic maritime region. Threats to maritime security are more effectively identified, addressed and mitigated through collaborative whole-of-government efforts to share information, contribute to a common maritime domain awareness picture, and leverage resources, tools and expertise to conduct joint threat assessments or risk assessments.

Transport Canada is one of five core partners in the marine security operation centres, or MSOCS, that Major-General Seymour mentioned earlier. These are key to the coordination of maritime surveillance, monitoring of shipping traffic, and intelligence activities in the north.

[*Translation*]

Through these centres, Transport Canada has access to a vast range of intelligence sources that help with our marine knowledge.

The sources include regional operations, information sharing networks with national and international partners, the national aerial surveillance program, and pre-arrival information reports.

In closing, let me add that Transport Canada remains resolved to support Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic by providing safe and secure marine transportation in Canadian Arctic waters and by protecting the marine environment in the region from the impacts of navigation.

[*English*]

Transport Canada will continue to work closely with our partners at all levels, including industry, to share information and collaborate on the identification, prevention and mitigation of threats to marine security and marine safety. In doing so, we will continue to improve situational awareness and our ability to exercise Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic.

Thank you, and we really do look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Weldon.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I'll go straight to questions.

We'll start with Mr. O'Toole, please.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for appearing as part of this. It's great to see an almost Arctic team approach here with the agencies represented, and I appreciate your comments, Commissioner Hutchinson, with respect to our first nations being part of this, particularly the Canadian rangers.

My questions will be fairly distinct, and whoever thinks it's most appropriate to answer, I'll defer to you.

In the Northwest Passage, which is an inland waterway for Canada, but some view differently, do all countries notify us when they're having a transit through the Northwest Passage?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Jane, you can start, since you put the framework in place, and then we'll pick up with some comments to finish.

Ms. Jane Weldon: That's good.

NORDREG, which is the northern Canada traffic services zone regulations, are Transport Canada regulations but are, as the commissioner was implying, run, administered, and operated by the Coast Guard. They have been in place since 1977. At that time, it was a voluntary ship reporting system, but as of July 1, 2010, that became a mandatory or obligatory reporting system. Basically it's a system of procedures and requirements for vessels that are within or are intending to enter our waters.

With respect to when they tell us, they have to give us 24-hours' notice. The reporting zone is 100 nautical miles, which lines up with our environmental protection Arctic waters pollution prevention regulations. Those two things are lined up to ensure that we know when vessels are in our waters, and then we keep an eye on the pollution.

But I'll turn it over to—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Let me stop you there. That's helpful in terms of the notice period.

Has a Chinese vessel ever given notice under the regulations in the 24-hour period?

● (1550)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The Chinese vessel *Xue Long* transited. It did a circumpolar navigation last summer as you are likely well aware. It was much more than just the Northwest Passage. Yes. They notified us both under NORDREG, but also in terms of the science missions that they meant to execute in our waters, and they had the necessary permits for those missions as well.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Do you have a vessel trail, or a come alongside, or was there the opportunity, if it were presented, for us to rendezvous in a friendly way with the vessel?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Our approach to the *Xue Long* was similar to our approach with all Arctic traffic, and that is to say, we have regular interaction with all the ships in the Arctic. We have a daily ice call with any of them that want to be in contact with us. By knowing voyage plans, knowing where ships are, and using that to assess risk, we position assets accordingly.

Could we have had a friendly hello, a friendly hail, with the *Xue Long* due to our placement of assets? Yes, we could have. Was it driven specifically by the *Xue Long*? It was driven by our assessment of the risk across the Northwest Passage at that time.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Was it a surface asset or an air asset?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We had surface assets placed. At that time of the year it's common. Speaking specifically of today, our assets are placed along the Northwest Passage where we need them, depending on traffic patterns today.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you. Please thank your crews who are on those vessels in the remote parts of our country.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Thank you. We will do that.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Lately we have a lot of disagreements with our friends in the United States, but the Beaufort Sea is one. When the Americans are operating or looking at any sort of jurisdictional issues including licensing in the Beaufort Sea, what is the process in terms of deconflicting or notification with Canada? Are any of you aware operationally?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I don't know that I could speak to licensing in the Beaufort. What I can speak to is that we have a very high level of co-operation and collaboration with the Americans in the Arctic through the Arctic Coast Guard Forum that I mentioned previously, but also bilaterally. For example, we do on-water live training with D17, which is based out of Juneau, Alaska. We also are working with the Americans on a project. It goes by different names, but the idea is to create safe, low-impact corridors throughout the Arctic.

I could get into this in more detail if you wish, but the idea is to essentially shrink the geography by investing more heavily where we know the ships are actually going. We're working with the Americans on that. Then with respect to American passages through our waters, they co-operate with us just as every other country does.

MGen William Seymour: Sir, I know you're not necessarily trying to unlock any military dimension of that, but I would suggest that because of the relationship we have with NORTHCOM, CJOC is well aware of any activities, and we co-operate and plan together in terms of any U.S. military activities in the Beaufort Sea.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: General, on the search and rescue piece, which is part of the three pillars that the commissioner outlined, we all recall in 1991 the Hercules crash, with Operation Boxtop. I worked at the rescue coordination centre for a time and I remember kayakers, and things like that, who had not called in but we were looking at deploying assets from Winnipeg.

If there was a major incident like that in a remote part of the Arctic, what would be the approximate response time for an asset, say, a C-130?

MGen William Seymour: I think the response time is based on the posture of forces we have up in the north. There's the standard SAR posture you're well aware of, but there's another posture I think that bears mentioning. Through our exercises throughout the year, we have a variety of exercises within the north, and that opportunity can also present a Canadian Forces asset that could respond to something. One example is there was a commercial airline crash, First Air, I believe, in Resolute Bay where we had an exercise. They were right there. My brother was among the folks who responded to that crash.

The more proper protocol we look at is the major air disaster plan. Frankly, we just finished an exercise up in Yellowknife where we exercised that plan, brought people onto the crash site, launched the equipment, and those kinds of things. The travel time from Trenton, Winnipeg, or one of the main SAR bases up to an area up north could be anywhere from several to up to nine or 10 hours, depending on where the crash site is located.

This is also important because SAR in the north is a multi-layered activity. Before that aircraft gets there, and before you drop some jumpers, chances are you have rangers on site, potentially RCMP, and local people from the villages, so we become an addition to the response that had already focused on the activity up there.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. O'Toole.

We'll have Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank the panel. It's great that we have you for two hours.

Major-General, you said something quite important. You said that we maintain a year-round regional presence so that we can know what's going on, and then you said that it's critical for our security.

We know what's happening in the air. We know that regularly we have long-range Russian bombers that test our abilities. These are long-range bombers that potentially carry nuclear weapons. We have a good idea of what's happening on the water surface. What about below the surface? Do we know what's happening below the surface, below the ice, especially when the ice is at its major extent? I ask that question because Russia's northern fleet has approximately 48 nuclear submarines. We know they test us and our allies regularly in the air and on the sea. Do we know what's going on below the ice?

MGen William Seymour: I expected this question, and it's interesting because, first of all, this is not the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, when Russian submarines might be lurking behind every corner. These days, based on technological advances, as you're well aware, the Russians can launch weapons against North America from their home bastions within their territory or slightly outside. The notion that Russian submarines, for example in this case, would have to travel underneath the ice in Canada's north to do their business is technologically out of date.

The plan we talk about when we talk work surveillance in the Arctic is Operation Limpid, an all-domain program we have to understand what's going on in the airspace, the waterways and underneath the ocean. Specifically, with respect to the underwater space, that is also a domain for Operation Limpid, as is the cyber domain, which is a part of it.

The key element for us in monitoring what's going on in the north is our relationship with NORAD and NORTHCOM. NORAD has a maritime domain awareness mission in addition to a control mission not in the maritime domain, and it's through that partnership with NORAD that we maintain awareness throughout Canada's land mass and underneath the ocean. It's that information that we share with the Americans and our allies and partners that allows us to be aware of what's going on below the surface on any given day of the year.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Just to be clear, are you saying that we have complete knowledge of everything that's happening below the surface of the ice throughout our Arctic territory?

MGen William Seymour: I wouldn't say we have complete knowledge. I don't have complete knowledge of what's going on in the land domain or on the surface on any given day. I have much more complete knowledge in terms of what's going on in the air. Frankly, we look at this as a risk assessment. We allocate resources to understand what's going on in the environment based on the threat that's posed to us. The threat is determined by both capability and intent, and we measure those kinds of things through intelligence and information sharing, and we allocate resources as a result, based on the threat.

I read the testimony from our Global Affairs counterparts, and they highlighted that they don't see a threat in Canada's Arctic. There is no threat. In terms of applying resources to understand what's going on in the underwater domain, resources are applied, some of which I can't talk about, but there are capabilities that Canada and the U.S. have to understand what's going on there.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Do we have maps that could show us the range of Canada's icebreakers? It was mentioned that there are seven. How many are fully functional in the Arctic, and do we have maps that show their range at maximum ice and minimum ice?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We normally deploy seven icebreakers to the Arctic, sometimes eight, and this year was no exception. We have 20 icebreaking-capable assets in our fleet, and we would classify 10 of those as being within the normal parameters of icebreaking operations. That's in part due to the addition of the three icebreakers that we just acquired recently. I'm trying to think whether I've seen a map that shows their range. We could certainly provide that to the committee to show....

● (1600)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: If that could be provided, I believe that would be helpful.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Given a couple of days, we can produce that.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

Ms. Weldon, when we agree to passage for ships travelling through the Northwest Territories, is there a fee involved? Has the department ever looked at what the costs might be to maintain a presence through the Northwest Passage? Have we done some sort of analysis of that cost, and the rising costs as vessels traverse the passage more often?

Ms. Jane Weldon: Interestingly, internationally, fees are not charged for transiting through another nation's waters. The right of innocent passage in international law allows, with some restrictions, vessels to transit through other countries' waters.

Fees tend to be applied when you enter a port or require a service from whatever country. At this point, ships that are transiting the Northwest Passage aren't calling at a Canadian port. They're simply passing through our waters. As a result, based on the current international framework, there is not an opportunity to charge for things. In the future that may change as ports become developed in the north, but at this point there is no fee.

Commissioner, do you want to speak to what happens in the case of your having to enter into things?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The fee regime is actually administered by the Coast Guard. As Ms. Weldon has described, fees are normally charged when a ship enters a Canadian port.

In the Arctic, there is a fairly far-reaching exemption of fees, particularly for ships that have more than 50% of their tonnage being used for community resupply. That applies north of 60°. There are details and nuances around this that are always under consideration, including ships that go north of 60° for a final destination that is south of 60°, if you think of Churchill.

In terms of the other part of your question, have we looked at charging fees outside of that framework? Yes, we have done some work. The general ethos, particularly as it pertains to search and rescue, is that we don't charge fees for that. We've worked through whether a cruise ship should have a fee structure applied to it when the primary service we might provide would be icebreaking, versus search and rescue, versus environmental.... There are some considerations there.

Internationally, the ethos is that you don't charge for search and rescue because you never want anyone to hesitate calling for help based on whether or not they have their Visa card with them.

The Chair: Just to keep on time, we'll go to Mr. Blaikie, please.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): I wonder if you want to finish your thought.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Thank you very much.

I would finish the thought by saying that, in addition to the fee regime, we also adhere to the polluter pays principle. If a ship were to discharge hydrocarbons in particular, in the Arctic, we would first seek to recover the cost of our operation from the owner and then from the ship-source oil pollution fund, which is the backstop to ensure that environmental operations are covered from a cost perspective.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: In terms of further questions, you mentioned that right now you have about 20 assets with icebreaking capabilities, and you usually have about seven deployed in the north. A big part of the conversation is about the north opening up and there being a significant increase in traffic.

Is the ship-building program in place right now for icebreakers designed to essentially replace the existing capacity, or have you made projections about the increasing need for ships as traffic increases? Presumably, there's a need for more assets in order to be able to do the same work for more traffic in the same area.

● (1605)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Our last public ship replacement plan is dated 2012. It does set out a plan for the replacement or recapitalization of the Coast Guard fleet. We have done further analysis around what recapitalization looks like, and that is under consideration at the moment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Are there any milestone years when you anticipate that, by a certain date, the overall capacity of the fleet would have to be expanded to accommodate what the anticipated traffic is, or do we not really have a handle on what we think the pace of development would be?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I think it's more the latter case, actually. We calculate that traffic has roughly doubled from 2010 until now. That is due, in part, to the mandatory reporting that we talked about earlier that came into place in 2010, so we have a better handle on who's actually in the Canadian north. We're still talking about 350 voyages a year. To put that in perspective, the port of Vancouver would be 3,500 a year.

What the traffic pattern looks like is unpredictable. We don't have a target date. We couldn't say, for example, that by 2030 we expect 500 voyages. No modelling exists right now that could give us that projection.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: We need a bit of a more nimble procurement process to try to respond to those challenges. I'm not asking. I'm just commenting.

One thing that's of interest to me as a member of Parliament from Manitoba—most of what we're talking about is a little further north yet—is that there's been a lot of discussion in Manitoba and across the country of late about the port in Churchill. Is it an important asset in anyone's mind, or something that can be used when we talk about Arctic sovereignty and asserting presence, or is it largely seen as something that has commercial potential, but not necessarily something that would play a role on the defence or Coast Guard side?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I expect my colleague from Transport will want to weigh in on this question. I'd simply say that from the Coast Guard perspective, we certainly pay attention to what's happening with the rail connection to Churchill. We have watched the track of patterns change over time in and out of Churchill. We definitely consider it important Canadian maritime infrastructure. We'll be ready to serve should the commercial potential change or develop there, but I think Transport can speak more directly to that.

Ms. Jane Weldon: As I'm sure you're more than well aware, there have been some challenges with respect to Churchill in the last several years, particularly with respect to the railroad. Unfortunately, a tragic accident happened there over the weekend that Transport's been very engaged in looking at.

Transport is very engaged with our partners in other federal departments, like Western Economic Diversification, but also with the provincial government and various companies that operate or have historically operated out of Churchill. We're keeping a very close eye on that port.

Our forecasts for economic development show the timing is a little off. Some people say global warming can't happen fast enough for certain areas. One might argue that for other reasons. For Churchill, they are in a difficult position right now, because there simply isn't sufficient volume at this time. There is potential for volume, and there's a competitive environment around volume, so we're definitely keeping an eye on that. We have staff up there and are committed to the work that's happening on the railway right now, which will impact how that port can operate.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: From a defence perspective, is there interest in Churchill? Is there concern that due to some of those timing issues the asset might lapse if there isn't sufficient commercial activity happening quickly enough, and that this would be the loss of an asset that has implications beyond its commercial value?

● (1610)

MGen William Seymour: Sorry, I can't comment. I'm a force employer, so I use the assets we have. I don't dabble in infrastructure, bases, or those kinds of things, so I can't offer a comment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Ms. Vandenbeld, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you to all of you for being here.

Mr. Hutchinson, you mentioned the oceans protection plan in your statement, and you said it allows for a year-round presence. I believe, Ms. Weldon, you also talked about the oceans protection plan. What is new with this plan? What is it that you're capable of doing now that you weren't able to do before?

Do you want to start, Mr. Hutchinson?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I'll turn to Deputy Commissioner Pelletier. He's the oceans protection plan lead for the Coast Guard, and for Fisheries and Oceans, as a departmental family.

To be clear, when we speak of year-round presence in the Arctic, we have a base that operates year-round in the Northwest Territories. I don't mean to suggest that we're currently able to deploy icebreakers year-round. Although, as Mario will describe in a moment, one of the key elements of OPP in the Arctic is extending the icebreaking season, both in the spring and in the autumn.

Mario.

Mr. Mario Pelletier (Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): There are a number of issues under the OPP that benefit the Arctic.

As the commissioner mentioned, the first one is the extension of the season. Last year we were out there for 35 more sea days. We intend to increase that by another 10 sea days in the next few years, basically showing up there a few weeks earlier in the spring and June and leaving a few weeks later in November. That's a major one, because more and more the resupply ships are there at the ice edge earlier, and they want to start resupplying. Obviously, they need to adjust depending on the ice conditions, but we make it our responsibility to make sure we're there to support them.

Another initiative is around the Coast Guard Auxiliary. We created a Coast Guard Auxiliary chapter in the Arctic. To give some context, throughout Canada the auxiliary has about 4,000 members, and about 1,100 units. In the Arctic right now we are at 15, we're going to be expanding with another five next year, and we have about 200 members. We're working really hard to expand that. We're going to increase the role of the auxiliary as well. Right now it's focused on search and rescue, and we provide training and everything else, but we want them to be part of the emergency response. If there's any pollution, they're on the ground, they're right in the community, so we can draw from their presence. Again, we'll provide training around that.

This year we also opened the first inshore rescue boat station in Rankin Inlet. That's a program we've had down south for many years. We hire students to deliver the search and rescue services. It's a very successful story in Rankin. We canvassed the 45 communities up north and did some risk assessment, and determined Rankin to be the best location. Also, we recruited from colleges and we had indigenous youth minding that station this summer. They just ended the operation last week.

The final one I want to touch on is the operational network. It's little known but the marine communications and traffic services centre in Iqaluit monitors the entire Arctic. This is where people report for NORDREG, ask for ice information and so on. We have dedicated, professional people at the centre who provide information and monitor the activities. We upgraded all the centres, and we have 11 communication towers throughout the Arctic that they use. Now we're upgrading the links between those towers to make sure we use state-of-the-art technology to ensure reliable communications networks, plus a business continuity plan.

These are all parts of investment for the Arctic.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

Ms. Weldon.

Ms. Jane Weldon: Our role, of course, is quite a bit less in terms of actual operations, but under the oceans protection plan, we did get some funding to be able to do vessel inspection in the Arctic. We have been able to dramatically increase the availability of our inspectors up north. They spend large chunks of the season up north inspecting various vessels at various facilities like Baffinland and in various ports as well. That allows us to ensure that the level of marine safety on vessels up there is kept to the same account. Historically, we had done the inspection in the south, but some vessels don't come down a lot and it's not the same thing.

Additionally, under the oceans protection plan, we've put a significant amount of funding into training. We have a contribution agreement with the institute in Iqaluit, and it has now opened up a training facility in Hay River where there wasn't previously a facility. That facility is doing training in marine with the goal of supplying more qualified mariners for various jobs in the north to increase the safety level for people who are fishing and engaging in other traditional uses of the marine environment.

Third, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we're working with a number of Inuit groups to look at how to better supply them with marine domain awareness information. There are issues in the north about access—for example, when you're out in a boat—to satellite information or other information about who is in the Arctic and who is in the water. The goal we have there is to ensure that we have a tool, like an app, designed for their needs as opposed to the kinds of things you can get on site now that are designed for other people's needs.

I should also highlight that, outside of the oceans protection plan, we are working with corporate interests that mine in the north to look at whether there are needs for formal pilotage services, be they formal through one of the pilotage authorities or less formal but requiring certain qualifications for people to be able to land those large ships in the various ports to ensure that there is adequate safety with respect to how those vessels land. As you can imagine, a large cargo ship is not the easiest thing to "park", as we like to jokingly say. We are now working with various companies to ensure that there are appropriate services in place so that we don't have any accidents.

● (1615)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I want to follow up on what Mr. Pelletier said about the indigenous students in the summer, and I noted that Mr. Hutchinson mentioned that many of the crews are indigenous.

Major-General Seymour, I believe you mentioned local communities. In terms of deploying assets from Trenton or Winnipeg, often the local communities might have the first eyes on what might be happening. Could I have you talk a little bit about the ways in which you're co-operating with indigenous communities like local Inuit communities?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Perhaps I'll start. I'll give you what I think is a very telling example. When we chose Rankin Inlet, we considered 46 communities for the inshore rescue boat program, and we used a framework to help us assess risk in doing that. We visited all 46 communities and we sat with their leadership and talked to them about their priorities, not just our priorities. When we announced one out of 46, we had co-operation from all 46 in the choice.

We believe very strongly that, when we say we work in partnership with somebody, this will become a hallmark of our relationship with the Inuit in particular. We'll sit down with them and we'll talk about shared priorities and their priorities rather than showing up with an Ottawa-based program. We believe in answers from the north for the north, not from Ottawa for the north, if I can put it that way.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

MGen William Seymour: I'll offer up a couple of thoughts. This morning I chatted with one of my generals who just came back from Yellowknife. He shared that, in the context of Exercise Ready Soteria, which is a major air disaster exercise, the truism in the north is that we all co-operate and work together to survive or we die. It's a truism.

There are two things to note in terms of our co-operation with indigenous peoples in local communities in the north. The lead on that for us is the commander of joint task force north, who some of you will meet when you go up north. His responsibility is to build those networks and relationships across the north. We rotate exercises among various communities to build the communities' capacities within themselves to respond to local emergencies and those kinds of things. We partner with the ranger groups, of which there are 60 throughout Canada's north. There are some 1,800 Canadian rangers across those communities, and that key partnership is worked by him across the north.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Sidhu, please.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all parties participating into this very important study going forward.

My concern is over a recent first-ever policy released by China. In that policy China refers to itself as a "near-Arctic state". Can you speak to the priorities that the defence department has in relation to defending the Arctic, other than China and Russia? What do you make of their statement saying, "near-Arctic state"?

● (1620)

MGen William Seymour: I've looked at China's Arctic policy and clearly from a defence perspective, given what we've seen on the part of China around the world.... I spent three years in the United States Pacific command and watched the Chinese expansion in the South China Sea, and that of course worries not just folks in the Asia-Pacific, but those who view the world through dark lenses and those who would seek to do things outside the rules-based international order around the globe.

From a defence perspective and looking at the Chinese paper, we see their interest spans the globe in terms of securing access to resources to fuel their industries. From a defence perspective, I'm not concerned because their approach is one of participation and co-operation in this domain now. With the fact that they're saying one thing in terms of a "near-Arctic state", I think as a Canadian, you hear that and you bristle a bit because we're a true Arctic state and Arctic nation. But whatever posturing that one nation would choose to do from a defence perspective, we don't see China as a threat within our Arctic. We see it as an aspirant in terms of securing access to global lines of communication and sea trade, which they're fundamentally interested in. They are looking to seek access to resources around the world, and Canada's Arctic is certainly one of them.

I'm less concerned about a Chinese military operation in the Arctic than Chinese companies buying Canadian companies or Canadian infrastructure or frankly cyber kinds of things. That's what I offer in terms of a defence perspective on that.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: What other threats do you see to Canada's sovereignty? Does your department see that as imminent? It can be the U.S.A. It can be Russia. Have you done any study on that part?

MGen William Seymour: It's interesting the way you asked your question. If you review the literature, some of which you received from Dr. Lajeunesse and others about the sovereignty issue....

Frankly, I don't see that Canadian sovereignty is under attack or under threat. We have sovereignty in Canada. It's ours, and I think you've heard from Global Affairs Canada, which spoke from a legal perspective about what sovereignty is. From a defence perspective, I guess our interest in sovereignty is speaking to what you offered, Commissioner, in terms of the security piece—sovereignty ignored is perhaps sovereignty lost.

From a defence perspective, our key interest in the north is maintaining an awareness of what's going on up there and having a presence year-round both to be able to see what's happening and to respond to what's going on, be that incursions from the kayakers, who were mentioned there, or other ships that weren't forecasted, or those who might seek to do us harm at some point when the waterways open up to the point where maritime traffic is significantly increased perhaps over the next decade or two. Those are the kinds of things we pay attention to.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: What kind of infrastructure would you like to see in that part of the region since China is investing a lot of money, going forward, exploring natural resources? Do you think the Canadian government should be spending money in infrastructure to defend our Arctic? Do you need to build more bridges and roads and railway lines going forward? It won't happen overnight but do you see the potential to spend money on infrastructure in that area?

MGen William Seymour: Sir, if I understand your question, you're asking me whether or not the Government of Canada should focus on establishing more infrastructure in the north to better prepare ourselves to defend against potential threats in the north. Is that a fair interpretation of your question?

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Sort of....

Does somebody else want to chip in on that when it comes down to exploring that area?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Given that our focus is response, our general philosophy about building response capacity—and I think I would say the same about marine infrastructure in the Arctic and I'd use the same logic—is that it should be developed as the circumstances require. It goes back to the previous question about first nations and Inuit. As their aspirations are met, and as economic development takes place, I'd underscore, in an environmentally responsible way, given the particular environment we're talking about and its need for particular defence, I think infrastructure investments can essentially keep pace as circumstances require. I don't know that we would express an opinion on whether infrastructure investments need to be made as an expression of sovereignty.

As the general said, sovereignty exists. It's exercised. We could go through a long list of different ways in which, just in the marine space, that sovereignty is exercised. Infrastructure can develop with context and as needs dictate.

● (1625)

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sidhu.

We're going to go to Mr. O'Toole, please.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

One thing about having two hours is that you're going to be stuck with me for two rounds, so thank you for your patience.

Like many things, we've talked about assets in the Arctic, and I think both sides are concerned about that. I want to talk for a moment about infrastructure. Many infrastructure projects, as the government is now learning, don't get delivered as quickly as you might like. The challenge is compounded in the Arctic. Conservative initiatives like the road to Tuktoyaktuk, which is now complete.... We're no longer there to cut the ribbon, so to speak.

I want to speak for a second beyond that road to Nanisivik, the deepwater port that is scheduled to open this fall. Could both Canadian Armed Forces and the Coast Guard, confirm to me that we're on time and on target with fall of this year, which is what I've heard? What are your expectations with respect to this asset for both fuelling and operations in Nunavut?

MGen William Seymour: I'm not the infrastructure guy, but as the force employer for the Canadian Forces, we're looking forward to Nanisivik coming on stream. I'm told it'll be ready for the 2019 season, and that's coincidental with the availability of the Arctic and offshore patrol ship and other vessels that would refuel from it. From a force employment perspective, the ability to refuel ships up north extends their duration and their ability to be there to increase their presence. It's not just military. The Coast Guard and others operate up there. Interestingly, my colleague from Denmark was very interested in looking for a gas-up once that opportunity was available.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Coast Guard, as well...?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Yes, it's same thing with the fuelling. Right now fuelling is all done from a ship-to-ship transfer, and it includes some risk, so having a facility where you're more stable is always safer. We also use Nanisivik as a laying-down place where we can lay down the cargo that can be picked up by another ship, which will bring it to a community. We're looking forward to the upgrade of the facility and using that facility next summer.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Will it be operational year-round, or just during the summer and shoulder seasons? What are the plans for it now? Do you know?

MGen William Seymour: My understanding, sir, is that it's not year-round. During high winter when it's fully closed in, it's only open a portion of the year. During the high winter season I understand that the local community, rangers and others, will be watching over it and maintaining its security, but it won't be open year-round.

Mr. Mario Pelletier: That is correct. Aside from Nanisivik the nearest community is Arctic Bay, which is about 40 kilometres away. The intent is to resupply that early as the season opens up, and the last ship that would leave would then make sure it's secured, and it would be looking at local communities to look after it.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Okay. Thank you.

Switching back from infrastructure to assets, you raised Denmark, General, so I may as well start there. In terms of air superiority and air presence in the Arctic, the U.S. has designated the F-35 as its only over-the-pole aircraft option. Denmark will be using the F-35 with respect to Greenland and its Arctic role. If we do not acquire the F-35.... The Liberals are buying the used F-18. That came up today, and I don't need you to comment on that, General, but if we are not an F-35 country in the north, will we be able to operate in our own jurisdiction with our allies?

MGen William Seymour: Simply stated, as a force employer, we will force-employ whatever aircraft we're provided with and we'll make it work.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Would you like to employ an F-35?

MGen William Seymour: I will employ any new aircraft that the government gives us.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: A wise general who wrote a transformation report, and who was here briefly a few minutes ago, said that the key to the forces' future was to be, in his words, smart, fast, adaptive and collaborative, which he termed "agile". Because of the paucity of resources in the Arctic, is it not a requirement for us to really collaborate with our allies? I'm talking about the United States, Denmark, and our first nations friends. Is that joint capability from a communications and asset standpoint not an absolute requirement in the Arctic?

● (1630)

MGen William Seymour: I would argue, based on what I've told you here today in terms of search and rescue and even some of the more fundamental defence response in the Arctic, that collaboration is essential, from intelligence to actually operating up in the north. We practise that each and every day.

Our relationship with NORTHCOM is a fundamental part of what we do. We exercise in the north. We exercise in command post exercises. In the exercises that we run, we invite all of our partners from NATO and elsewhere. We've certainly had observers from Denmark, the U.K., Germany, the Netherlands, and other countries.

When I co-chaired the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, which we've participated in since its inception in 2011, among the key things that we talked about was greater co-operation in sharing and exercises. We talked a lot about information sharing and intelligence sharing, so we're aware of what's going on in the Arctic spaces. That's fundamental to operating up there.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: If we have, say, the Super Hornet, would we have to make structural changes to make sure we have an interoperability with a fifth-generation aircraft? Would an off-the-shelf Super Hornet be able to have the same communications ability, the same link, with the nations using the F-35, from your knowledge, General?

MGen William Seymour: You're asking me questions that are outside of my bailiwick. Although I wear the uniform, I'm a force employer at CJOC. I think the statement requirements for the follow-on aircraft for the CF-18 are suitably robust, so that we'll connect to whatever it is we're doing up there and be fully interoperable.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, General.

In my experience, I find navigators are the most capable overall of being force-employed, so....

MGen William Seymour: Thank you for the compliment, sir.

The Chair: That's your time. Thank you.

Next is Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I'd like to follow up on some of the questions that you answered previously, Major-General.

I noted this concern about Russian subs potentially being in the Arctic, hiding in our Arctic north. You said it's "technologically out of date". Could you explain what you meant by that?

MGen William Seymour: The reason I said that is what we've seen in terms of advancing capabilities, be it Russian bombers who fly to the edge of our Canadian air defence identification zone more as a posturing activity rather than as something of necessity in terms of an attack on the North American landmass. They can take off from their bases in Russia and launch their missiles well outside the range of our CADIZ and our fighters, so from an operational perspective, actually approaching the old Cold War days when the bombers were going to penetrate the north and head down to do their bomb runs...that's what I mean by "technologically out of date". They don't need to do that. They can launch their weapons from outside the Canadian air defence identification zone.

Similarly, sir, with the weapons on those submarines, the range is such that they have a much broader area from which they can operate to hit their targets.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: It appears that you're saying we have a policy to assume that this is not something we should be concerned about. That's what I read into what you said. Is that correct or incorrect?

MGen William Seymour: I'd say it's incorrect in the sense that I'm not the policy guy. I'm an operations guy. I'm telling you that based on our understanding of the capabilities of potential adversaries. In this case, you asked about the Russians and their capabilities. You saw Mr. Putin on TV extolling the virtues of all of these super-weapons that they've developed. Their capabilities are such that we're not worried about the Russians wanting to park themselves in the Arctic landmass in order to shoot their weapons to the south.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I'm just curious. The Norwegians, who are our allies, seem to have taken a very different tack. They've decided to buy four submarines in 2019, and very specifically their Lieutenant-General Lunde stated that Norway is arming itself to deflect difficult-to-detect Russian subs, invisible Russian submarines that lurk in the Arctic waters. We have the Norwegians saying that the Russians are engaged in these sorts of activities, and it seems we're not concerned about this. They're concerned to the point that they're buying four additional submarines from the Germans to address this issue in their Arctic region. In fact, just a month ago it was reported that the U.K. and Norway have agreed that their sub-hunters will work together to counter the Russian naval submarine threat.

Can I have your thoughts on that? It seems that both our British allies and our Scandinavian allies are concerned about this, and it seems that we're not particularly concerned.

● (1635)

MGen William Seymour: Our course the U.K. and Norway were part of the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable discussions, and that was certainly amongst the things that we talked about. My observation, from having attended a couple of those, was that how you see things depends on where you sit and your vantage point. If you're looking at the threat from the Canadian landmass up over to the Arctic and seeing what the Russians are doing, your perception, I would suggest, is different from what it will be if you are living in Norway where you abut Russia and the maritime forces located in their northern sea fleet are just adjacent to your country. Frankly, none of that surprises me. Of course the Norwegians would take an approach whereby they'd buy capability to protect themselves, because the Russians are operating in their Arctic.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Maybe it's not a nuclear threat, but is it not a challenge to sovereignty? The Russians have done something that many people laughed at. They went so far as to build a special submersible to plant a Russian flag on the Arctic sea bed to further a false claim of Russian sovereignty on that territory.

Could they be building up a capability looking forward? You said that we need to look forward 10, 20 or 30 years from now. Could we be caught in a situation 10, 20 or 30 years from now? We've seen it with China and the South China Sea where they've built up military capabilities and then countries are faced with a de facto result. Could it well be that they're preparing?

They're building their military bases. They're adding to their nuclear fleet, their northern fleet. They've just launched this special *Sibir* icebreaker with capabilities that no one else has and they're planning to launch more of those. Could we be caught in a situation 10 or 20 years from now that, as much as we diplomatically try to reinstate Canadian territory and Canadian sovereignty over these sea beds, de facto, we won't be able to do much about it?

MGen William Seymour: Sir, I think you're asking a speculative question that is based in part on a showboating event conducted by the Russians. I think previous testimony highlighted that some of the kit they used to do that was probably Canadian.

The interesting piece, when you look at the Russian buildup in their north and their Arctic, as I think a number of commentators out there have suggested and I share this view, is that it is due to a number of things. One, from a national psyche perspective, is that they need to build up the north because they have more than 2.5 million people living in the north. It's fundamental to who the Russians are. It's their near abroad. Of course they would pay attention to this and build up security, especially when that security had lapsed over the eighties. The state of their defensive posture in the north right now is less than it was at the height of the Cold War, so it's certainly not the kind of concern, perhaps, that some had suggested.

The second piece is that this buildup is related to their desire that the northern sea route be the preferred route for shipping to go from China to Europe or perhaps to North America. That economic priority or economic sense that the north is key to the future of Russia's economy is integral, I think, to what the buildup is.

The third piece is that the Russian northern fleet is located in the north, so the buildup is intended in part to make sure that they're able to protect that capability in the north. Inferring then that 20 or 30 years hence the Russians might then be interested in or seek to do things in North America, I think, is speculative and not necessarily borne out by what we're seeing.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. O'Toole, please.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

While I share my friend Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's concern about Russian aggression in the Arctic, he asked a number of rounds of questions on subsurface capability. I'd remind my colleague that the Upholder class, the Victoria class, was "acquired", I'd like to say, for our navy. It was actually bartered from the British. It was acquired in 1998 but didn't see service until 2005. It didn't sail in the Arctic until 2007.

We have a limited capacity now. Are our current subsurface assets, the Victoria class, capable of regularly deploying to the Arctic? How do they fit into the asset mix?

MGen William Seymour: Perhaps my maritime colleagues might be able to shed a bit more light on that. I'm not a submariner by background.

As a force employer, I can tell you this. As you've seen over the past number of years, the submarines operate during the open season in the approaches to the north. They're a conventional diesel submarine. They don't have the capability to operate under ice, as other platforms would, but they are certainly very capable up to and including that point.

I hope that answers the question, sir.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Does the Coast Guard have any regular interaction with subsurface RCN assets in arctic waters?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: No, we don't.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Would an under-ice capable subsurface asset be one that you would force-employ, through either a modern diesel or nuclear-powered submarine? Would that asset be helpful to operations in the Arctic?

MGen William Seymour: From a force employment perspective, it's almost speculative to talk about what kind of asset mix would be ideal to deal with things. From a threat perspective, I would suggest that it's not necessarily something we would advocate at the expense of other capabilities. The kind of mix of capabilities that "Strong, Secure, Engaged" is advocating for and is certainly funded for and is going to deliver is ideal in terms of our sense of what the threats to Canada are.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Let me talk briefly about a much cheaper asset but quite as effective, and that's the UAV. I know from a veteran friend of mine that ING Robotic was trialing a UAV project with first nation use to operate in the Arctic for animal, environmental and a whole range of things.

Has this been a type of technology, at least for observation and surveillance, that any of the departments have engaged? How are plans going with that?

Ms. Jane Weldon: I guess I can respond to that.

We definitely are making use of an RPAS device in the Arctic that we were piloting this year. We've also made use of it in other parts of Canada. It's been quite helpful from a Transport Canada perspective. We use these devices to surveil for pollution. One of the issues one has is with people dumping things like grey water, or a potential leakage and that type of thing. We have been using the RPAS to more economically get to places that are difficult to get to by plane and have more range.

Definitely that's something we're pursuing. We have a project under way right now. We are actually in the assessment phase, at this point.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Would it be fair to say that between our conventional air assets—I know that the Auroras do northern patrols quite regularly—and drones or UAVs, we have some sort of air presence most days in the Arctic, or is this sporadic?

MGen William Seymour: What I would offer, sir, is that under Operation Limpid, we collaborate across the board to bring multiple air assets, certainly from Transport Canada, using Coast Guard helicopters and using contracted air assets, not to blanket but to provide a broad level of coverage based on what it is we want to see in the north.

In terms of questions about RPAS, you know that "Strong, Secure, Engaged" calls for the procurement of a larger UAS that we anticipate will operate up in the north and supplement the capability we're bringing on board with our radar-based satellites, which will allow us to see what's going on in the Arctic. We'll have a better understanding in that the RPAS will simply add another layer of information to have that full and complete picture of what's going on up north.

● (1645)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Is there the possibility of engaging Canadian rangers so that we could have young first nation or Inuit youth as part of that higher-value skill set of operating UAVs? As that presence increases in the north, the value of the rangers, I think, is their knowledge and respect for the environment—as you said, the stewardship piece. Has that been looked at as part of the growth in this space for our more effective surveillance in the Arctic?

MGen William Seymour: It's an interesting question, because with the proliferation of UASs from small range to larger, it certainly presents an opportunity. What I can tell you is that for the first time this year we actually incorporated the rangers into our Operation Limpid program. We located them on the shores of certain transit routes and equipped them with radios to connect to the information we're receiving to better understand what's going on in that environment. That's very much a first step.

That's a very interesting proposal, sir. I think that may have some merit at some point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. O'Toole.

We'll have Ms. May, please.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you very much. I thank the committee for their indulgence to let me ask a few questions, particularly Ms. Vandenbeld. Anita has given me the time, I'm guessing, but anyway, thank you.

First of all, I'm very grateful for the briefing. I have a bunch of questions. They fall into a couple of categories.

Let me start with this question. I think that so far it was our Coast Guard colleagues who came closest to acknowledging that we are all operating in Inuit territory when we're operating in the Arctic. Under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it would seem to me—and it may be implicit in what you're saying—that the existence of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and their governance over northern territories is actually a great way of proving our sovereignty.

I want to ask you to reflect on that and also, if you can, on whether there is any role in your work for a reflection of the Arctic Council as the circumpolar governance structure, which also gives a seat for Inuit at the table. How much does that advance our interests? Maybe it's a Transport Canada question more than it is Coast Guard or military, but I'll leave it to you.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Perhaps I can start with the first part of the question and then turn to Ms. Weldon for the Arctic Council aspects.

I take that point about the existence of the ITK and the other northern governments. I think that not only those agreements, but some of our southern modern treaties in particular.... As I was saying to the chair earlier, he and I used to work in the area of aboriginal rights. I've spent some time there myself. I don't mean to tread into my old domain, but I certainly personally could see that the existence of those agreements, the very novel things that they do in the maritime space in particular, to me fit on a very long list of things that we do in the Arctic, which shows that Canada has been sovereign there for a long time.

I take that point. We work very closely with ITK leadership on almost on a daily basis. I think that's very well put.

On the Arctic Council, Ms. Weldon...?

Ms. Jane Weldon: Yes. I'll just add with respect to the Arctic shipping corridor, for example, which is something in which we're deeply engaged with ITK, as the commissioner says, on a very regular basis. Similarly, the initiative we're doing with respect to trying to identify marine domain awareness systems is done completely with local communities and all Inuit hunters and fishers, because there's no point in developing an app that's not completely embedded in community needs.

With respect to the Arctic Council, obviously Canada has an important role in the Arctic Council, and Transport Canada definitely plays a significant role in the policy development role of that council. I guess I would say that from our perspective any work that happens frankly anywhere in the country at this point has indigenous engagement embedded in the beginning of it. Because of the focus through the oceans protection plans on the coast, indigenous consultation and also indigenous involvement directly in developing products are key to making anything successful.

Ms. Elizabeth May: For my next question, I'm shifting gears a bit. As climate change.... Of course, that's a major focus, but the question may seem a bit trivial given the enormity of the climate threat. We are seeing the Northwest Passage opening up and cruise ship interest increasing, so tourism is an issue.

Normally we were getting 10 cruise ships a year there, and 2,600 passengers, and then in 2016.... I know, Jeffery Hutchinson, that you were directly involved with planning for the *Crystal Serenity* coming through, with 1,000 passengers and 700 crew. If anything goes wrong.... I know that this ship was particularly well prepared and had its own helicopters on board and so on, but the tendency of human nature is to begin to think that this is a passage that cruise ships can make.

I don't think we have the preparedness as a nation for the emergency response that we would need if a ship wasn't as completely prepared as the *Crystal Serenity* was. We don't have the capacity. I shouldn't state this. How would we respond to a tourism cruise ship worst-case scenario for hospitalization and reaching people when they're in about the most remote place one can imagine?

It would be a great way to establish our sovereignty to have more emergency response and more preparedness for what's inevitably going to be an increase in tourism.

● (1650)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Perhaps I'd start with what is a truism for mariners and I don't mean this glibly, so please know that. There are many places where ships go that are remote and that we're responsible for, including search and rescue taskings to the middle of the Atlantic or to the middle of the Pacific. That's a perspective that we might start from.

I think that our capabilities and our combined capabilities to be able to respond certainly speak to Canadian sovereignty, at one level, but I think there's a broader context there that has to be kept in mind. There was already reference to the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act and NORDREG. These are unique regimes that we've applied, in recognition that Canadian sovereignty in the archipelago isn't exactly the same as the exercise of sovereignty in the Caribbean or southeast Asia, for example.

We are alive to the fact that the ITK lead people who have looked out their back doors at solid water for many millennia. All of which is to say that if you start with that framework and then you add in the efforts of the polar code from the IMO, the polar code represents an international recognition that operating in the Arctic is a unique environment.

We then have the framework to say to operators that your cruise ships actually do fall into our principal risks in the archipelago right now, perhaps more so than Russian submarines. You do have to operate responsibly. You do have to be self-sustaining and self-sufficient. The *Crystal Serenity* set a particularly high mark in that respect. Other operators are paying attention.

When things go poorly and sometimes they do, there's no question that the provisions of the polar code and NORDREG for that matter and the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act are meant to keep that ship sustainable for the period of time that allow the Heres, the icebreakers and Inuit response teams to get there.

I think we have a robust regime. I think we have a lot of capability. I think we shouldn't underestimate the role of the operators themselves to have to bring the right assets to the table.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Do I have time for one quick question?

The Chair: The witness would like to respond to your question.

Ms. Jane Weldon: I just wanted to add that, in addition to all that, in the last year, we have developed a set of guidelines, in concert with both the local Inuit and the cruise ships association. These are voluntary guidelines, but they were very much at the behest of industry, who wanted support from government and local communities to understand better what they needed to do.

These are in addition to the polar code and Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, which speak to things like you don't get off a cruise ship and take 1,000 people and put them on shore at some poor community. They also speak again to preparedness and best practices from *Crystal Serenity* and other opportunities as they arise. It's just to highlight that industry has been very co-operative.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have to go to Mr. Aboultaif, please.

Thank you, Ms. May.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you.

Thanks for appearing today and thanks for your service to our country.

The word that was most heard today was "sovereignty". I think that's a key word in our discussion and in the plan of the committee to explore further the Arctic and what's happening there.

The first thing that comes to mind is that in terms of equipment, Russia has 51 pieces of equipment and the rest of the world has 39. Yes, there's major interest in it for Russia that didn't just happen yesterday—it's been there for over 100 years—as well for Canada and the United States and Europe. We know that the Arctic is rich with resources. There's also the well-used term "polar silk road" with regard to the interests of China.

In my opinion, and I'd like you to comment on this, sovereignty is not just a matter of a claim. It's a matter of the ability to maintain what you have. Here's the challenge. There are two ways we can defend our position and at least defend our interests. The first is government policy and government position and activity. On the other side are the forces on the ground.

As you represent the forces on the ground, what's your assessment of sovereignty? Although I heard from Mr. Hutchinson that there's not much of a concern, what's your assessment moving forward in the next 10, 20 or 30 years? Are you ready to present a plan, or rather to advise the government or the political side of this, on the challenges, on how ready we are, and on how we can react if anything unusual happens? We've seen Crimea. We've seen a lot of other places in the world. I think we do have that concern.

As I said, sovereignty is not a matter of a claim but a matter of how ready and able you are to protect.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Perhaps I'll start from the civilian perspective.

As was said earlier, there's a good argument to be made, in my view, that sovereignty is not under threat in the Canadian Arctic. The commercial shipping perspective on sovereignty might be something like this. Sovereignty is not so much about excluding somebody or preventing somebody from entering your maritime space. It's ensuring that whoever enters your maritime space does so on your terms, perhaps in compliance with international law as well, because we are a defender of the international rules-based order.

The framework that Ms. May and I were discussing a few moments ago—those are our terms. That is how you come into Canadian waters in the Arctic. In terms of our co-operation, which we have with the Chinese through the North Pacific Coast Guard Forum and with the Russian coast guard through the Arctic Coast Guard Forum and the North Pacific Coast Guard Forum, from where we sit, our rules, our terms, are not a matter of debate, and they're not being raised as a matter of debate.

From a maritime commercial perspective, a civilian perspective, sovereignty is not under threat. I personally would fall into the camp of folks similar to what I think Major-General Seymour was describing. The need for Russian icebreakers and Russian assets is driven by many other factors. To see those assets as being lined up as a threat to Canadian sovereignty in any way—we see no evidence of that, from where we sit.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: What I'm talking about in terms of a plan is going to the department and at least observing that there is a plan that we can see for the next 10, 20 or 30 years that will give us the ability to be ready if anything happens. The reason for that question is that at some point, an American politician was talking about a continent-wide, custom-free zone in the Arctic somehow. We're talking about close to five million square kilometres out there. That could be a matter of co-operation among the international community or the governments or countries with interests in the region.

Again, to get back to us, are we ready? Do we need to employ more forces? Do we need to have more equipment? Do we need to have more infrastructure? This is not to go back to the same question on infrastructure, and I'm not putting all this weight on your shoulders. I just want to know how well we are planning for the future when it comes to the Arctic.

● (1700)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Your comments are interesting and well taken. The American Coast Guard finds its very earliest roots as a cutter service to enforce excise tax, whereas the Canadian Coast Guard finds its very earliest roots as a search and rescue and life saving organization. Those differences in where we've come from continue to inform our operations to a certain extent.

That said, with regard to our co-operation with the Americans and with the Russians and with the other Arctic coast guard nations, it must be underscored that we have a search and rescue agreement with the Arctic coast guards. It's a vast area—we all know that—and outside of the archipelago, where ships can get into trouble, we have to work together. That level of co-operation, shared understanding and shared experience are perhaps our best preparation for what you foresee 20 or 30 years out.

It's currently the case that there isn't another coast guard in the world that can put the experience forward in the Arctic that the Canadian Coast Guard can. I don't say that with pride. I say with all humility that we have the most experienced Arctic crews and captains. They look to us for leadership, and that leadership takes shape in the co-operation that we have with those other coast guards.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Badawey, go ahead, please.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, fellows and ma'ams, for being out today.

My first question is with respect to the task operations that may be elevated due to the fact that we might have added presence in the area. With that, as Mr. O'Toole, I think, was getting to, are the more disciplined infrastructure investments that you're going to have to make to then protect and/or manage a sovereign asset.

Some of the notes here in the binder are about the marine communications and traffic services centre, the MCTS. First of all, is this system in real time?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Yes.

Mr. Vance Badawey: It is.

The second question is with respect to the radar AIS ADS-B, as well as the shore-based and ship-based radar. Are they integrated? When you are looking at your automatic dependence surveillance system, your automatic intelligence surveillance system, as well as the shore-based and ship-based radar, are they in fact integrated?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: We have what we call the marine domain awareness that integrates all of those feeds into a single system.

Mr. Vance Badawey: That's, in fact, what I'm getting at—the marine domain system.

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Right.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Third, with respect to automation and analytics, do you have the ability to collect historical marine traffic to support future planning?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: That is correct. We can provide statistics on that.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Fourth is with respect to big data and, of course, with that, complex event alerting and interactive analytics. Do you have those abilities through this system as well?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: I'm not sure about the term you're using.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Essentially, when you look at complex event alerting and interactive analytics when it comes to shipping and/or movement that happens within the area over time, do you have that ability to actually collect that data, analyze it and, of course, once again make that planning not only in current time but well into the future?

Ms. Jane Weldon: Yes. There's a group at Transport Canada whose responsibility is transportation system data analytics. That's one of their major roles. It's multi-modal. Obviously, it's done for all the different domains because it's obviously integral to our having sufficient information to look at the economic side of our mandate, as opposed to the regulatory side.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Again, this is where I'm going with this. When you look at not just the shipping part of it but also the environmental part of it, high resolution radar imagery actually shows different things that happen not just with shipping but also with ice movement and things that can actually impact on safety, especially when you have cruise ships and other traffic in that area. Do you have the ability, through this system, to actually show the high resolution radar imaging of not only the ice movement but also the texture of the ice within a 24-hour period?

● (1705)

Mr. Mario Pelletier: That is correct. We do receive imagery and we also share that with the industries that use the waters. We also have specialized radar on ships that can detect different kinds of ice and the consistency of the ice.

Mr. Vance Badawey: I mentioned earlier the shore-based as well as on-vessel, and, of course, with you folks it's all integrated.

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Yes. We have the marine security operations centres as well that have all those feeds and can integrate those.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Looking at forecasting, with wind changes, ice formations, movement, etc., is that all built into the system as well?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Environment Canada collects all the data relating to forecast, conditions and weather, and they provide that information to us as well.

Mr. Vance Badawey: In asking these questions I have to be very up front, because we have a company in our area called Accipiter Radar, down in Niagara, that is actually looking at a lot of this technology. I know it sometimes might be a nuisance for you guys to be called out here to be witnesses, but all we're trying to do is to find methods and mechanisms that we can help you put in place and invest in for future growth in this area, whether it's security, tourism, the economy, or of course, the infrastructure investments that have to be made moving forward, based on your recommendations.

Second to that, we have people in our own areas of the world that can actually add this infrastructure, taking it to 2018 and beyond. We can help you out in that regard, so you guys can do your jobs a heck of a lot easier than in the past.

With that, I'll ask if you have any more comments you want to make before I end my time.

You're all good.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Colleagues, that wraps up our discussion with transport, coast guard and defence. We very much appreciate this.

As you know, we're speaking of a significant part of Canada's geography. It means a lot. Some of us are an exception and have spent quite a bit of time in the far Arctic, but most Canadians have not. This is an important opportunity, through a study, to flesh out a bit what is going on in the Arctic from your perspective and with regard to sovereignty. I really appreciate the time you've given us today, and I look forward to speaking to you more once the committee gets up north.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much. We've very much enjoyed the opportunity.

Colleagues, I'm going to wrap it up. I wanted to let you know that today is my last meeting as your chair. I will be doing some other things. I'm going to join the Green Party.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I wanted to say thank you. It's been three good years. I look forward to seeing you in the House and talking about other things. I wanted you all to know firsthand, before even my constituents find out that I'm doing something else.

Thank you very much. it's nice to see all of you.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, as vice-chair of this committee—and my other vice-chair is not here, although Daniel is doing his best to fill in for her—I want to say thanks.

We've crossed swords a few times, but it's always been done with respect. I'm sorry to hear of this development. We'll miss your wealth of information. Hopefully you'll treasure that artwork we got you in Vietnam as a nice memory of this time on committee.

The Chair: It will be close to my mantle somewhere.

Thank you very much, Mr. O'Toole.

Thank you to everyone. I very much appreciate your time.

The meeting is adjourned.

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